



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

# LARRY CRAIG

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NEWS RELEASE

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## **REMINDER: MEDICARE DRUG BENEFIT DEADLINE ON MAY 15**

Craig Encourages Seniors to Consider Signing Up for Medicare Drug Benefit

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Idaho Senator Larry Craig is encouraging older citizens without prescription drug coverage to consider signing up for a Medicare-approved prescription drug plan. The deadline is Monday, May 15. Those who have not chosen a drug plan by the Monday deadline will face a lifetime financial penalty -- a 1 percent increase in premiums for each month of delayed enrollment.

“As a group, senior citizens are saving millions of dollars under the new Medicare prescription drug plan. The typical senior who previously lacked drug coverage will, with a Medicare prescription drug plan, save an average of \$1,100. If you haven’t yet signed up, I strongly encourage you to consider doing so to save yourself money,” said Craig.

Craig noted that competition from the companies who provide the Medicare prescription drug cards has driven the costs of the plans down.

“According to the bean counters, the average premium seniors pay for their prescription drug benefit is just \$25 per month instead of the predicted \$37 per month, and this year the federal government will spend 20 percent less overall on the Medicare drug benefit than was projected last July,” Craig said.

It is low-income seniors who receive the best deal under the new program. On average, Medicare will pay for more than 95 percent of the costs of prescription drugs for low-income seniors. About a third of seniors are eligible for prescription drug coverage that includes little or no premiums, low deductibles, and no gaps in coverage.

“I voted for this legislation because I didn’t want to see seniors choosing between buying food and purchasing medication. I know it isn’t a perfect program. But, I’m pleased to report that under President Bush, we have made a serious dent in the pain seniors have had in paying for the drugs they need,” Craig said.

6,000 customer service representatives are available at 1-800-MEDICARE. Those with computer access can sign up online at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

According to federal officials, it takes most seniors about one hour to sign up -- once they have their information about their healthcare needs. Before you make the call or go online, seniors should make a list of their prescriptions or just gather their pill bottles, and make sure they have their red, white, and blue Medicare card handy to get personalized help.